

Mâtürîdî Düşünce ve Mâtürîdîlik Literatürü

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SELÇUK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
İMAM MÂTÜRİDÎ UYGULAMA
VE ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ

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MÂTÜRÎDÎ DÜŞÜNCE VE MÂTÜRÎDÎLİK LİTERATÜRÜ

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Kitap Adı:	MÂTÜRÎDÎ DÜŞÜNCE VE MÂTÜRÎDÎLİK LİTERATÜRÜ Mâtürîdî Araştırmaları: 2
Editörya:	Dr. Öğr. Üyesi M. Raşit AKPINAR Doç. Dr. Recep TUZCU Arş. Gör. Aslı MENEKŞE
Kapak & Mizanpaj:	Duran AYDOS
ISBN:	978-605-64761-3-6
Baskı & Cilt:	Step Ajans Matbaa Ltd. Şti. Göztepe Mah. Bosna Cad. No: 11 Bağcılar/İstanbul Tel: 0212 446 88 46 Sertifika No: 12266



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İSTANBUL 2018

Bu eserde yer alan makalelerin bir kısmı, Selçuk Üniversitesi İmam Mâtürîdî Uygulama ve Araştırma Merkezi tarafından 14-15 Eylül 2018 tarihinde Konya Beyşehir'de gerçekleştirilen Uluslararası İmam Mâtürîdî ve Mâtürîdîlik Literatürü Sempozyumunda sunulan bildiriler arasından seçilmiştir. Eserin tüm yayın hakları Endülüs Yayınları'na aittir. Eleştirel makale ve dergilerde yapılacak kısa alıntılar dışında, bu kitabın bir kısmı veya tamamı, yayıncının izni olmadan yayınlanamaz.

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The Doctrine of the Nature of the Qur’ān in the Māturīdī Tradition

Philip DORROLL ^{1*}

One of the most divisive theological controversies of the classical Islamic period was the debate over the nature of the Qur’ān. This debate over whether the Qur’ān should be described as uncreated or created derived from broader theological questions about the nature of God’s attributes, particularly God’s attribute of speech, and the relationship of God to the created world. What does it mean for God to speak to human beings? If God spoke to human beings in revelation, what did they hear? If God is capable of speech, is this attribute eternal? If so, does this mean the Qur’ān, as the speech of God, is also eternal? How can it be eternal if it is in any way “other than” God?

This article will demonstrate that the Māturīdī school opinion on this issue began as distinct from both the Ash’arī (uncreated) and Mu’tazilī (created) positions on this issue. Māturīdī and his early school followed the practice of Abū Ḥanīfa and were hesitant to take a particular stand on this issue, preferring instead to affirm both the eternity of God’s speech and the contingency of the ways human beings access that speech. This article will show how the arguments of Māturīdī and his early school were very consciously designed to separate themselves

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from both the Ash'arî and Mu'tazilî schools, castigating both the literalism of the former and the excessive rationalism of the latter. For the purposes of this article, the “early school” of Mâturîdî, or what I refer to as the “pre- Nasafî” period, is defined as the partisans of his theology in Samarqand after Mâturîdî's death and before the ascendancy of Abû al-Mu'in al-Nasafî's (d. 508/1115) theology after the late 12th century.

This article will further argue that it was Nasafî who shifted the stance of the Mâturîdî toward the Ash'arî formulation regarding the uncreated Qur'ân. In other words, tracing this history of this issue in Mâturîdî theology reaffirms two important dynamics of the early Mâturîdî school: the conscious desire to distinguish themselves from both excessive literalism and excessive rationalism, and the clear historical demarcation between the pre and post-Nasafî tradition of Mâturîdî theology.

The Controversy over the Nature of the Qur'ân

The debate over the nature of the Qur'ân began during the second half of the eighth century.² The argument that the Qur'ân was created by God in time (*makhlûq*) appeared earlier than the argument that it is identified with the eternal attribute of the speech of God (*kalâm Allâh*) and therefore uncreated (*ghayr makhlûq*). The thinker reputed to have been the first to hold the position of a created Qur'ân was Ja'd ibn Dirham, who was executed under the caliph Hishâm in 124-125/742-743.³ The doctrine was also said to have been held by his student, the infamous Jahm ibn Şafwân, who was executed in 128/746 for his involvement in the revolt of Hârith ibn Surayj.⁴ The doctrine probably arose as part of the larger theological concern to distance God from anthropomorphic description. In Madelung's summation: “speech is a human attribute. It requires, moreover, organs of speech, which God must not be conceived of having.”⁵

2 Wilferd Madelung, “The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran,” *Orientalia Hispanica: sive studia F. M. Pareja octogenario dicata/edenda curavit J.M. Barral* 1974, 504.

3 W. Montgomery Watt, “Early Discussions about the Qur'ân,” *Muslim World* 40/1 (1950), 28; Nahide Bozkurt, “The Caliph Ma'mun and the Doctrine of the Createdness of the Qur'ân,” *Christliche Gotteslehre im Orient seit dem Aufkommen des Islams bis zur Gegenwart*, 103.

4 Bozkurt, “Doctrine,” 103.

5 Madelung, “Origins,” 507.

The appearance of the doctrine of the created Qurʾān in the mid-late eighth century seems to be confirmed by the fact that the first attacks on the doctrine occur toward the end of the eighth century.⁶ The first opponents of the position were members of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth, the traditionist scholars who advocated for the centrality of ḥadīth in the elaboration of Islamic religious practice and doctrine. From this period on, arguments against the notion of a created Qurʾān were made on the basis of the affirmation of the Qurʾān as God's speech, which traditionist scholars argued is among the eternal attributes of God (*ṣifāt Allah*). The traditionist Yazīd ibn Hārūn al-Wāsiṭ (d.205 or 206/820-822), for instance, is quoted as saying: "The Qurʾān is the speech of God, may God curse Jahm and whoever says what he has said..."⁷ Anti-Jahmiyya literature from this period stresses the need to affirm the reality of God's speech and the identification of the Qurʾān with God's eternal attribute of speech.⁸

The explicit argument that the Qurʾān itself was uncreated (*ghayr makhluq*) was consolidated in the middle of the ninth century by the organized representatives of the traditionist school of thought. Based on the list in al-Ashʿarī's *Al-Ibāna ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyāna* of authorities who argued for an uncreated Qurʾān, it seems clear that the coalescence of groups espousing the uncreated doctrine did not occur until at least the time of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795).⁹ Similar groups also formed around Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), but it was not until the career of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) that the uncreated position was supported through systematic arguments and treatises. The writings associated with the life and thought of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal offered the first systematic elaboration of the uncreated position.¹⁰

As Madelung demonstrates, however, the earliest opposition to the doctrine of a created Qurʾān did not mean explicitly holding that the Qurʾān was therefore uncreated and eternal: "the early scholars... merely insisted that the Koran is truly the speech of God and denied that it is created without turning this denial into a positive doctrine

6 Madelung, "Origins," 504.

7 Madelung, "Origins," 507.

8 Madelung, "Origins," 507-508.

9 Watt, "Discussions," 35-36.

10 Watt, "Discussions," 36.

affirming its eternity or pre-existence.”¹¹ Before the *miḥna* the formulation *ghayr makhlūq* was not widely used, even by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal himself.¹² The first theologian to explicitly hold that the Qurʾān is eternal (*qadīm*) was probably Ibn Kullāb (d. 240/854). As we will see later, this early position of defending the Qurʾān as the speech of God but not necessarily affirming its uncreatedness is similar to the early Māturīdī school’s discussions of this issue.

It was the *miḥna*, the famous inquisition attempted by a series of caliphs in the mid-ninth century to impose the doctrine of the created Qurʾān on the ‘ulamā’, that made Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal famous and in the end ensured the dominance of the explicitly uncreated position among the majority of Sunnī religious authorities. The *miḥna* was instituted by the caliph al-Mamūn in 833 and continued under al-Muʿtaṣim and al-Wāthiq until it was ended by al-Mutawakkil around the year 850. Bozkurt has convincingly argued that al-Maʾmūn’s policy was motivated by his desire to secure right belief and faith among his subjects.¹³ Van Ess also demonstrates that throughout his reign al-Maʾmūn intervened directly in the religious life of the Muslim community like no other Caliph before him, issuing more religious decrees than any previous Caliph.¹⁴

In the long run, however, the *miḥna* backfired: Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the traditionists emerged from the persecution with immense moral authority due to their resistance to religious oppression, and as a result the uncreated position, and Muʿtazilī *kalām* in general, became far more controversial and over time lost significant institutional support.¹⁵ The eventual acceptance of the uncreated position as a key component of Ashʿarī *kalām* and Sunnī orthodoxy much to the steadfastness of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in the face of the merger of Muʿtazilī *kalām* with state power. Traditionist opposition to the doctrine of createdness coalesced into a positive doctrine of their own that emerged triumphant: the Qurʾān is eternal and uncreated.

11 Madelung, “Origins,” 513.

12 Madelung, “Origins,” 520–521.

13 Bozkurt, “Doctrine,” 111.

14 Josef Van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, Vol. 3, Trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom (Brill: Leiden, 2017), 483.

15 Madelung, “Origins,” 525.

Abū Ḥanīfa and the Early Ḥanafīs' Reaction to the Controversy

Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and his early circles' views on this controversy are particularly important because the Māturīdī school in theology was a member of the larger Ḥanafī tradition of *fiqh* and theology. Though Abū Ḥanīfa's theological and *fiqh* views were highly controversial in his native Kufa, his doctrines and practice became widely adopted and celebrated in the eastern territories of the early Arab-Islamic empire, most notably Transoxania (where Samarqand was the home of Māturīdī and the theological tradition that followed him).¹⁶ With respect to *fiqh*, Abū Ḥanīfa and his circle were known for advancing Islamic juristic methodologies that valued flexible individual reasoning (*ra'y*) when trying to understand how best to follow the guidance of the Qur'ān and the Prophetic example in varying social and historical circumstances.¹⁷

Abū Ḥanīfa and his circle were equally renowned for their theological positions. The most famous and influential of these was their argument for a clear theological distinction between faith (*īmān*) and works (*'amal*). They famously identified the essence of religion (*dīn*) with the former, meaning that faith (and hence membership in the Muslim community) was based on individual intellectual assent (rather than on the performance of certain duties). Religious duties remain crucial for Islamic religiosity and the following of God's will but are conceptually distinct from faith.¹⁸

Abū Ḥanīfa and his circle seemed much less inclined, however, to take a position on the nature of the Qur'ān. For one thing, the issue itself did not seem to be as urgent during their lifetime (the late 700s), and only become so a few decades later (in the early to mid 800s).¹⁹ Later historical material attributes a variety of positions to Abū Ḥanīfa

16 Josef Van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, Vol. 1, Trans. John O'Kane (Brill: Leiden, 2017), 228; Josef Van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra: A History of Religious Thought in Early Islam*, Vol. 2, Trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom (Brill: Leiden, 2017), 628-636; Wilferd Madelung, "The Early Murji'a in Khurāsān and Transoxania and the Spread of Ḥanafism," *Islam* 59 (1982): 32-39.

17 Van Ess, "Theology, Vol. 1," 218

18 Van Ess, "Theology, Vol. 1," 223-224.

19 Van Ess, "Theology, Vol. 1," 220.

himself, accusing him of both positions depending on the narrations in question; opponents of his school were particularly eager to accuse him of holding the created position.²⁰

There does seem to have been at least one authentic account of a legal view of his regarding the Qurʾān that may give a sense of how he might have answered this question. Abū Ḥanīfa and his early school more generally “disapproved of someone swearing on the Koran because the Koran was something other than God.”²¹ In other words, Abū Ḥanīfa and his early school implied by this view that the Qurʾān might be described as “created” insofar as it is something other than God (anything that is other than God must be created). It is important to note, however, that this *fiqh* argument was made without reference to the specific theological controversy of the nature of the Qurʾān and reading such a position back into this account is conjectural at best.

Indeed, it seems clear that the earliest disciples of Abū Ḥanīfa were very reluctant to take a position on the increasingly controversial issue one way or the other. Abū Ḥanīfa’s illustrious student Abu Yūsuf (d. 798) forbade prayer behind anyone that asserted either that the Qurʾān was created or uncreated, i.e., anyone who took an explicit position on the issue at all.²² There is also a (very probably reliable) report cited in the *Tārikh Baghdād* to the effect that neither Abū Ḥanīfa nor any of his students took a specific position on this theological issue. In other words, Abū Ḥanīfa and his circle’s position in the controversy was unclear, and probably very deliberately so.²³ Their hesitation to take a strong stance on either side would be echoed in Māturīdī and his the early school tradition that followed him.

²⁰ See for instance his biographical section in *Tārikh Baghdād* material in Ashʿarī’s *Ibāna*.

²¹ Van Ess, “Theology, Vol. I,” 220; Madelung, “Origins,” 509.

²² Madelung, “Origins,” 519–520.

²³ The narration (number 33 in the large entry on Abū Ḥanīfa) attributes this claim to Abū Sulaymān al-Juzjānī (d. after 200/815), the teacher of Abū Bakr al-Juzjānī, a committed Ḥanafī scholar who helped found the tradition of Ḥanafism in Samarqand (see Josef Van Ess *Theology*, Vol. 2, 633; and Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, trans. Rodrigo Adem (Brill: Leiden, 2015), 45; 132). In other words, the material arguing for the neutrality of Abū Ḥanīfa and his early disciples seems to come from sources close to this circle itself, and therefore is in my view reliable information.

Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī on the Nature of the Qur’ān

Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)²⁴ was one of the most influential theologians in the history of Sunnī Islam. He was born in Māturīd (in or near Samarqand) and spent his career and life there. The school of theology that developed around his work came to be accepted as one of the great Sunnī orthodox theological traditions. Though biographical traditions list a number of works attributed to him, only two complete works of his survive: an extensive Quranic commentary (*Tāwīlāt al-Qur’ān*) and a single manuscript copy of his principle theological work, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* shows that he elaborated a comprehensive Islamic theological system based on rational proof and elaboration of key themes in the Quranic text and Ḥanafī tradition, meant to establish the rational bases for Muslim belief in the highly plural and contentious intellectual environment of the period.

Māturīdī’s discussion of the Qur’ān lacks the concerns of the Ash’arī-Mu’tazilī debate over its status as created or uncreated. In *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, Māturīdī begins his discussion of the Qur’ān with a discussion of the need to affirm God’s attributes in general. He makes this case in the familiar fashion, by arguing that affirmation of the eternal attributes of God is necessary lest God be imputed with notions of inability or incapacity: ascribing the attributes to God is in fact a “description of the lack of defect and [God’s] exaltedness above imperfection.”²⁵ In other words, if God is not described by the attribute of

24 For a very brief summary of his life and works, see: M. Sait Ozervarli, “Al-Maturidi,” *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 2nd ed., Ed. Martin, et al. (New York, NY: Macmillan, 2016), 602-603. Recent extended treatments include: Ahmet Ak, *Büyük Türk Alimi Maturidi ve Maturidilik* (İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2017); Hülya Alper, *İmam Māturīdī’de Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2013); Dale Correa, *Testifying Beyond Experience: Theories of Akhbar and the Boundaries of Community in Transoxanian Islamic Thought, 10th-12th Centuries CE*, Unpublished Dissertation (NYU, 2014); Philip Dorroll, “The Universe in Flux: Reconsidering Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī’s Metaphysics and Epistemology,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 27:2 (2016): 119-135; Ramon Harvey, *The Qur’an and the Just Society* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017): the second chapter is a detailed interpretation of Māturīdī’s theology as a basis for a theory of justice and ethics; Rudolph 2015; and Ulrich Rudolph, “Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 280-296.

25 Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 118.

knowledge, for instance, this implies that God is ignorant, and this is a defect. The absolute perfection of God cannot admit of defects, and thus God must be described by these attributes.

Consistent with his theological method, Māturīdī offers two types of proofs for the need to affirm the attribute of speech: one from scripture and one from reason. From scripture, he cites Sūrat al-Nisā' 64: "and God spoke to Moses directly." From reason, he argues that a being that is knowing (*ālīm*) and able (*qādir*) but is not at the same time a speaker would possess deficiency, either through incapacity or prohibition. God is above both of these, therefore proving that God is a speaker (*mutakallim*), and thus possesses the attribute of speech (*kalām*).²⁶ Māturīdī clarifies that God's capacity to address human beings through speech does not, however, imply humans' ability to come into contact with the essence of God's speech.²⁷

Though he clearly affirms the reality of God's eternal attribute of speech, Māturīdī is much less clear on the exact nature of the Qur'an. Indeed, one gets the sense reading Māturīdī's text that while he is aware of the issues at stake in the debates over the ontological status of the Qur'an, he is hesitant to use the terminology himself. Māturīdī comes closest to addressing the ontological status of the Qur'an when he discusses God's speaking to Moses: "And if someone says 'Did God make Moses hear His speech, as it says: God spoke directly to Moses'? It is said in response: [God] made [Moses] hear in the language of Moses and in letters that He created and sound that He brought forth; thus He made [Moses] hear what was not created [*mā laysa bi makhluq*]."²⁸ In this passage Māturīdī introduces the fundamental point at issue in the early Māturīdī²⁹ school's understanding of the Qur'an: the distinction between the physical means of delivering the Qur'an as the speech of God and the content of the Qur'an itself. The former is created and the latter is not. In other words, Māturīdī clearly distinguishes between the eternality of God's speech and the contingency of the ways human beings access that speech.

26 Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 120.

27 Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 121-122.

28 Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 122.

29 i.e., pre-Nasafi, as will be explained later.

This distinction was so important to the early followers of Mâturîdî that it laid the basis for a unique formulation for the status of the Qur'ân, a formulation that was very likely created in order to situate themselves in the broader debates about the ontological status of the Qur'ân without at the same time abandoning their own distinct *kalâm* heritage by declaring allegiance to either the stance of the followers of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal or the Mu'tazila. Direct evidence for the existence of this “third way” of talking about the Qur'ân is found in the extant writings of Mâturîdî's students and followers, to which we now turn.

The Early Mâturîdî (pre-Nasafî) Formulation on the Nature of the Qur'ân

A “school” or tradition of theology based on the methods and teachings of Mâturîdî emerged after his death, constituting a distinct tradition of Sunnî dogmatic theology known as the Mâturîdiyya.³⁰ This tradition first took hold among his followers in Samarqand during the century after his death, soon becoming closely associated with that city in particular. In the following centuries, the school increased in status outside Samarqand as it encountered other schools of Islamic theology such as Ash'arism. Turkic rulers who followed Central Asian Ḥanafî tradition also helped spread the school westward and beyond. Their influence was felt around the Muslim world in areas that followed the Ḥanafî school, particularly the Ottoman Empire.³¹ Turkey is currently the global leader in the study and continuation of Mâturîdî tradition, with significant scholarship also taking place in Central Asia, the U.S., and Western Europe.

30 For a very brief treatment of this school's history and its relationship with Mâturîdî, see Philip Dorroll, “Maturidism,” *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 2nd ed., Ed. Mart'in, et al. (New York, NY: Macmillan, 2016), 602-604. Recent extended treatments include: Recep Alpyağlı, *Din Felsefesi Açısından Mâturîdî Gelenek-i* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2017); Angelika Brodersen, *Der unbekannte kalam: Theologische Positionen der frühen Maturidiya am Beispiel der Attributenlehre* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2014); Philipp Bruckmayr, “The Spread and Persistence of Mâturîdî Kalâm and Underlying Dynamics,” *Iran and the Caucasus* 13:1 (2009): 59–92; Correa 2014; Sönmez Kutlu, ed., *İmam Maturidi ve Maturidilik* (Ankara: OTTO Yayınları, 2018).

31 For recent studies of Ottoman Mâturîdism, see Philip Dorroll, “Mâturîdî Theology in the Ottoman Empire: Debating Human Choice and Divine Power, in *Osmanlı'da İlm-i Kelam: Alimler, Eserler, Meseleler* (İSAR Yayınları: İstanbul, 2016), 219-238, and the rest of this volume in general; Yahya Raad Haidar, *The Debates between Ash'arism and Mâturîdism in Ottoman Religious Scholarship: A Historical and Bibliographical Study* Unpublished PhD Dissertation (Australian National University, 2016); and Mehmet Kalaycı, *Tarihsel Süreçte Eşarîlik Maturidilik İlişkisi* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2017).

The earliest known example of the distinctive Mâturîdî-Samarqandî phraseology regarding the Qurʾān is found in *Al-Masāʾil al-ʿAshr al-ʿIyādiyya* by Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-ʿIyāḍî (d. ca. late 4th/10th century). Abū Bakr al-ʿIyāḍî was the son of Abū Naṣr al-ʿIyāḍî, Mâturîdî's famous teacher who was killed in battle, though as Özen points out, it is very likely that Abū Bakr al-ʿIyāḍî was very young when his father died because there is no record that he ever studied with him.³² It is very likely that he instead studied under Mâturîdî and other prominent scholars in the region, given the scholastic orientation of his family.³³ In extant biographical material he is described as being one of the most capable and accomplished *faqîhs* in the region at the time and a true leader of the community of the faithful.³⁴ Qurashî also describes him as a strong partisan of Ḥanafism.³⁵ He was also known to have been involved in debates, particularly with local traditionists (whom later Mâturîdî sources would critique through reference to the Ahl al-Ḥadîth or the Ḥanābila). It is recorded that he attended a debate at a madrasa affiliated with the Ahl al-Ḥadîth of the area, where he also demonstrated his laudably humble nature by being willing to confess when he did not know the answer to a particular question.³⁶

Abū Bakr al-ʿIyāḍî's short creed text is important because it contains the first known usage of the specifically Mâturîdî-Samarqandî phrase to describe the nature of the Qurʾān: "The Qurʾān is the speech of God, and the speech of God is uncreated and not contingent."³⁷ At first glance, this phrase might seem unremarkable and even indistinguishable from Ashʿarî formulations declaring simply that "the Qurʾān is uncreated." As further examination will show, however, that this Ashʿarî phrase is precisely what the Mâturîdî-Samarqandî *mutakallimûn* meant to avoid, and they did so by putting distance between the terms "Qurʾān" and "uncreated." They were comfortable instead with the assertion that the "Qurʾān is the speech of God, and that the speech of God is uncreated."³⁸

32 Şükrü Özen, "IV. (X.) Yüzyılında Maceraünnehir'de Ehl-i Sünnet-Mu'tezile Mücadelesi ve Bir Ehl-i Sünnet Beyannameşi," *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 9 (2003), 65.

33 Özen, "Ehl-i Sünnet," 65-66.

34 Özen, "Ehl-i Sünnet," 67-68.

35 Qurashî, *Al-Jawāhir al-Muḍīyya*, I: 178.

36 Özen, "Ehl-i Sünnet," 68.

37 Özen, "Ehl-i Sünnet," 84.

38 An immediate difficulty presents itself with respect to this formulation. The terms of

The second late tenth century reference to the distinctive Mâturîdî-Samarqandî position is found in a manuscript of a commentary on Abū Salama Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Samarqandî's (ca. 2nd half of the 4th/10th century) *Jumal Uṣūl al-Dîn*. The discoverers of this important manuscript in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul (Şehid Ali Paşa 1648), Von Kuegelgen and Muminov, convincingly show that this commentary dates from the late tenth century and was most likely authored by the son of one of the students of Abū Naşr al-'Iyâdî, Mâturîdî's teacher, a certain Ibn Yaḥyâ.³⁹ Like Mâturîdî, Ibn Yaḥyâ affirmed the reality of God's eternal attribute of speech. He goes on to mention the distinctively Mâturîdî-Samarqandî position on the Qur'ân: "Our *shaykhs* apply the phrase that 'the Qur'ân is the speech of God, uncreated and not contingent,' and some of them use the phrase 'the Qur'ân is the speech of God and the speech of God is uncreated, not contingent'."⁴⁰

The specifically Mâturîdî-Samarqandî phrase is also used by Abū al-Yusr Muḥammad al-Bazdawî (d. ca. 421/1030-493/1099), an influential member of the Transoxanian '*ulâma*' and a follower of the Mâturîdî school of *kalâm*, in his *Kitâb Uṣūl al-Dîn*.⁴¹ Like Mâturîdî, Bazdawî also affirms the eternal attributes of God in general, and emphasizes the importance of speech in particular: "The Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamâ'a say that God is a speaker by means of the [attribute of] speech, and He is preexistent in His speech as He is preexistent in all of his attributes. His speech is uncreated, and neither fabricated, an occurrence in time, nor a contingent thing."⁴² With respect to the status of the Qur'ân, Bazdawî asserts that:

It is not incumbent on anyone to assert the statement that "the Qur'ân is uncreated"; however, it is incumbent on one to say that "the Qur'ân is the speech of God, and the speech of God is uncreated."

the formulation seem to be the first two terms of a syllogism, leading to the inevitable conclusion that the Qur'ân is uncreated. However, as will be shown, for the Mâturîdîs themselves this formulation was offered as a conscious alternative to the simple statement that "the Qur'ân is uncreated."

39 See Anke Von Kuegelgen and Ashirbek Muminov, "Mâturîdî Döneminde Semerkand İlahiyatçıları" in *İmam Mâturîdî ve Mâturîdîlik: Tarihi Arka Planı, Hayatı, Eserleri, Fikirleri, ve Mâturîdîlik Mezhebi*, ed. Sönmez Kutlu (Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2011), 279-191

40 Süleymaniye Library Şehid Ali Paşa 1648, 61a.

41 According to Linss, Bazdawî's grandfather was a student of Mâturîdî. A brief biographical entry on Bazdawî can also be found in Ibn Quṭlûbughâ, *Tāj al-Tarâjîm fî Ṭabaqât al-Ḥanafîyya* (Baghdad: 1962), 198.

42 Abū al-Yusr Muḥammad al-Bazdawî, *Kitâb Uṣūl al-Dîn*, ed. Hans Peter Linss (Cairo: 1963), 53.

Were one to say absolutely that “the Qurʾān is uncreated,” then it is acceptable and is not harmful, provided that the reading of the Qurʾān and its recitation and its pronunciation [is understood to be] created, and that the absolute sense of the statement [be understood] to apply to the speech of God.⁴³

Bazdawī here explicitly contrasts the Māturīdī-Samarqandī formulation with the Ashʿarī one, though he does not explicitly refer to it as such. While he does not condemn the Ashʿarī formulation outright, he clearly expresses his reservations towards it and his preference for the Māturīdī-Samarqandī formulation. As with Abū Bakr al-ʿIyāḍī’s text, Bazdawī’s assertions clearly point to the existence of a third option when speaking about the Qurʾān, an option likely formulated by followers of Māturīdī’s *kalām* in Samarqand in response to the much more explicit and heated debates about the status of Qurʾān occurring between the Ashʿariyya and the Muʿtazila outside of Transoxania.

Other evidence for the Māturīdī-Samarqandī formula can be found in later authors, such as ʿAlā al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Samarqandī al-Usmandī (488/1095- 552/1157), a Māturīdī-Samarqandī scholar and *mutakallim* about whom little else is known. In his *Lubāb al-Kalām*, Usmandī explicitly mentions the customary Māturīdī-Samarqandī position: “Some of our shaykhs say: it is not permissible for one to say that ‘the Qurʾān is uncreated’; instead, one must say that ‘the Qurʾān, which is the speech of God, is uncreated’.”⁴⁴ Usmandī’s statement is interesting in that it implies that at least some of the partisans of the Māturīdī-Samarqandī formulation were strict in its application, arguing that it be used in explicitly in place of the Ashʿarī formulation.

The most explicit mention of the existence of the peculiar Māturīdī-Samarqandī position comes from Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī (438/1046-508/1115) in his *Tabṣirat al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*:

As for our teachers from among the imams of Samarqand, who were comprehensive in their knowledge, the formulation that they used in this

43 Ibid., 66.

44 ʿAlā al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Samarqandī al-Usmandī, *Lubāb al-Kalām*, ed. M. Sait Özer-varlı (İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2005), 79.

matter was that “the Qurʾān is the speech of God and His attribute, and the speech of God is uncreated, and likewise His attribute.” They did not say absolutely that “the Qurʾān is uncreated” lest it lead to the presumption on the part of the listener that these [linguistic] expressions that were composed of letters and sounds be uncreated, as the Ḥanābila say.⁴⁵

Nasafî here clearly points to the existence of the distinctively Mâturîdî-Samarqandî position on the ontological statues of the Qurʾān. He also alludes to the polemical context of this assertion, hinting at the Mâturîdî desire to distance their positions from those of the tradition-ists or Ḥanābila.

The Theological Argument Behind the Formulation

The reason for the use of this peculiar Mâturîdî-Samarqandî formula can be found in Mâturîdî’s brief discussion of the nature of the Qurʾān. As discussed above, “[God] made [Moses] hear in the language of Moses and in letters that He created and sound that He brought forth; thus He made [Moses] hear what was not created.” The key distinction made here is a distinction between the contingent elements of linguistic expression through which human beings access the speech of God and the actual eternal attribute itself, which like all of God’s attributes remains inaccessible to human beings. Mâturîdî *mutakallimûn* elaborated on this initial distinction made by Mâturîdî himself.

Abū Salama Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Samarqandî (ca. 2nd half of the 10th century) outlined this distinction in particular detail. As mentioned above, Abū Salama was the author of *Jumal Uṣûl al-Dîn*, the commentary on which was written by Ibn Yaḥyâ and is preserved in *Şehid Ali Paşa 1648*. Abū Salama was the student of Abū Aḥmad al-ʿIyâdî, a student of Mâturîdî, placing his death at the end of the tenth century.⁴⁶ He describes the distinction between the linguistic expressions of the Qurʾān with the actual speech of God itself:

45 Abū al-Muʿin Maymūn ibn Muḥammad al-Nasafî, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla fî Uṣûl al-Dîn* (Volume I), ed. Hüseyin Atay (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2004), 373.

46 Abū Salama Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Samarqandî, *Jumal Uṣûl al-Dîn*, ed. Ahmet Saim Kılavuz (İstanbul: Emek Matbaacılık, 1989), 16-19.

It is permissible that what is in physical manuscripts of the Qurʾān [maṣāḥif] and the breasts of people be called “Qurʾān” and the speech of God in the sense of what is understood from the meaning [of the text], not in the sense that it is [the speech of God] in actuality [fi al-tahqīq], as it is said “this is the word of so-and-so” and as it is said with respect to what is written with the letter “this is God”, for were [this writing] actually.

Him in actuality, it would not be permissible that God be described by it from eternity.⁴⁷

This excerpt is perhaps the earliest example of a Mâtūrîdî *mutakallim* attempting to elaborate on the distinction mentioned by Mâtūrîdî himself. Abū Salama argues that the Qurʾān to which we have immediate access, whether through recalling it in our own minds, reading its words on a physical page, or hearing it recited through sound, must be distinguished from the actual attribute of the speech of God. The actual attribute cannot, of course, be instantiated in anything related to human physicality, such as the memory, letters, or sounds.⁴⁸ Abū Salama provides a potent analogy for this point: the written word “Allāh,” though it points to God, cannot actually be equated with God or the essence of God. The word for God merely indicates its referent and cannot be identified with it.

This is in fact how Mâtūrîdî theologians described the letters and sounds of the Qurʾān: as “indicators” (*dalālāt*) of the actual speech of God.⁴⁹ Nasafî also calls these physical indicators “linguistic expressions” (*ʿibārāt*), a term that pithily sums up what Mâtūrîdî meant when he referred to the ways in which human beings access the Qurʾān as the understood content of the speech of God, without actually accessing the divine attribute of speech itself.⁵⁰ The commentary on *Jumal Uṣūl al-*

47 Abū Salama al-Samarqandî, *Jumal Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 19.

48 This point is made particularly clear in Usmandî: “[The speech of God] is written in the texts [of the Qurʾān], recited by tongues, preserved in hearts, without becoming instantiated in them” (79).

49 Nasafî, *Tabṣīrat al-Adilla*, I: 373; the same terminology is also used in Bazdawî, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 60-61; and Nūr al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Maḥmūd ibn Abī Bakr al-Şābūnî, *Al-Bidāya fi Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Bekir Topaloğlu (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2005), 32.

50 Nasafî, *Tabṣīrat al-Adilla*, I: 373; the term is also found in a later work of Mâtūrîdî *kalām* by Abū al-Thanaʾ Maḥmūd ibn Zayd al-Lāmishî (ca. end of the 5th, beginning of the 6th century hijrî,

Dîn makes the same distinction, arguing that the Mâturîdî-Samarqandî phraseology is used in order to avoid neglecting the denial of creation and contingency with respect to the Qur'ân, since doing so would involve negation of [the attribute] of speech, [and] lest it be thought that the color, the letters, and the utterance that comprises that which is understood from the speech [of God], are uncreated. However, in their recitation is that which is understood from them, and that is the understood, recited, preserved, and known speech, the speech of God.⁵¹

This passage makes it clear that the intent of the Mâturîdî-Samarqandî formula has at least two important goals: 1) to affirm the eternal attribute of God's speech, and 2) to highlight the distinction between the content of the speech of God which is intellectually understood by the human being (which can only be accessed through physical means such as letters and sounds), and the actual attribute of speech which remains inaccessible to human beings. Using Mâturîdî terminology, this distinction can be summed up in the contrast between "indicators" (*dalâlât*) or "linguistic expressions" (*ibârât*) and the actual content of the Qur'ân that is "understood" through them (*al-mafhûm*).

Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafî's Shift

This peculiarly Mâturîdî-Samarqandî formulation did not endure, however. As is well known, Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafî's *Tabṣīrat al-Adilla* became the most influential systematic text in the Mâturîdî tradition, and is far more numerous in manuscript collections than Mâturîdî's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (which as mentioned above exists in a single surviving copy). What became adopted as orthodox Mâturîdî *kalām* after the end of the 12th century is based on Nasafî's monumental work. One of the many ways in which Nasafî influenced the later development of Mâturîdî *kalām* was his explicit rejection of the early Mâturîdî-Samarqandî formulation in favor of the more well-known Ash'arî statement that "the Qur'ân is uncreated." After describing the customary Mâturîdî-Samarqandî position (the authority of which he acknowledges by calling it the phrase used by "our teachers from among the imams of Samarqand"), Nasafî concludes

late 11th early 12th century), his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd li-Qawā'id al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Abdel-Magid Turki (Paris: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1995), 72.

51. Sehîd Ali Pasa 1648, 61a.

by arguing that the evidence he has presented necessitates the use of the shorter Ash'arī phrase: "the Qur'ān is uncreated." He clarifies his use of the phrase by saying: "by which I mean the attribute subsisting in the essence [of God], which is [God's] speech."⁵² This qualification seems to suggest that he is attempting to make the same Māturīdī distinction between the physical expression of the content of the speech of God and the actual divine attribute of speech; however, he makes the argument that this distinction can safely be maintained by using the Ash'arī phrase in place of the older Māturīdī-Samarqandī formulation. Nasafī also seems to evince a new level of concern for this question in general, a question which at the time of Māturīdī did not seem to be of major concern to *mutakallimūn* in Samarqand. Nasafī argues that the Mu'tazilī position on the attribute of speech and the Qur'ān leads to denial of the Sharī'a, which he describes as the grossest blasphemy, the denial of religion in total.⁵³

After Nasafī's theology becomes widely accepted as authoritative in the late 12th century, the early Māturīdī-Samarqandī phrase disappears from use and is replaced by the shorter Ash'arī formulation. For instance, Nūr al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Maḥmūd ibn Abī Bakr al-Ṣābūnī (d. 480/1184), the Māturīdī scholar who famously debated Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and whose works were widely copied and distributed, adopts the shorter Ash'arī formulation: "If the term 'al-Qur'ān' is mentioned in the sense that it refers to that which is recited [as opposed to that which is written or to the act of recitation] it is pre-existent, uncreated; thus we say: the Qur'ān is the speech of God, uncreated."⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that, like Nasafī and other Māturīdīs, Ṣābūnī also attempts to preserve the distinction between the understood content of the speech of God and the created vehicles that deliver it in a form that can be apprehend by human beings.

52 Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-Adilla*, I: 393.

53 Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-Adilla*, I, 374-375.

54 Al-Ṣābūnī, *Al-Bidāya fi Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 32.

Concluding Questions: The Case of Abū Shukūr al-Sālimī

There is at least one early Māturīdī theologian who utilized the Ashʿarī phraseology: Abū Shukūr al-Sālimī (*d. ca. early 6th/12th century*). Very little is known about him, other than his affiliation with Māturīdī theology and the city of Samarqand. Based on internal evidence in his only surviving work, *Al-Tahhīd fī Bayān al-Tawhīd*, Al-Sālimī *was most likely a contemporary of* Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī.⁵⁵ *Sālimī's text is particularly interesting for our analysis because unlike other early Māturīdī theologians, it uses the Ashʿarī formulation; but similar to other early Māturīdī theologians, it attempts to clearly distinguish itself from Ashʿarī theology more generally. Sālimī's work may therefore be seen as a kind of transition between the pre and post-Nasafī era in Māturīdī theology.*

According to Sālimī, Māturīdī theologians (which he identifies with orthodox Sunnism) hold that “the Qurʾān is descended from God upon his Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him; written in the texts without being instantiated or emplaced in them; heard by our faculty of hearing; recited by our utterances and our tongues; preserved in our hearts.”⁵⁶ The Ashʿarīyya, on the other hand, hold that “the Qurʾān is the speech of God, instantiated in the essence and subsisting thereby, inseparable from it; non-descended and neither written nor heard nor preserved.”⁵⁷ *Sālimī's essential claim here about Ashʿarī theology is that it identifies the essence of the speech of revelation too closely with the essence of God. Sālimī more closely identifies the speech of revelation with its meaning and signification.*⁵⁸

Sālimī then argues that the orthodox Sunnī formulation is in fact the phrase identified with Ashʿarī theology: “The Qurʾān is the speech of God, uncreated.” Sālimī also maintains that the position of the created Qurʾān is simply heretical (kufr).⁵⁹ Sālimī does however clarify what he means by his usage of the phrase “speech of God”: he argues that this

55 Abū Shukūr al-Sālimī, *Al-Tahhīd fī Bayān al-Tawhīd*, ed. Ömür Türkmen (İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2016), 16.

56 Abū Shukūr al-Sālimī, *Al-Tahhīd fī Bayān al-Tawhīd*, 187.

57 Abū Shukūr al-Sālimī, *Al-Tahhīd fī Bayān al-Tawhīd*, 187.

58 Abū Shukūr al-Sālimī, *Al-Tahhīd fī Bayān al-Tawhīd*, 187-188.

59 Abū Shukūr al-Sālimī, *Al-Tahhīd fī Bayān al-Tawhīd*, 189.

phrase is an attributive one (the *idāfah*) in the same manner as the phrase “the house of God” or “the she-camel of God.”⁶⁰ In other words, he clarifies that his usage of this phrase is not indicate a confusion between the essence of God and the speech of God. He further clarifies that the supposedly Ḥanbalī and literalist position is also simply heretical; this is that not only the Qurʾān but also the contingent parts of its recitation (such as the letters and sound) are also uncreated.⁶¹ Thus, while *Sālimī utilizes the* Ashʿarī formulation, he seems to be making similar theological arguments as other Mâturīdī theologians. *Sālimī’s text also shows that the transition to the post-Nasafī* universal adoption of the Ashʿarī formulation was likely a long and complex process.

60 Abū Shukūr al-*Sālimī*, *Al-Tamhīd fī Bayān al-Tawḥīd*, 189.

61 Abū Shukūr al-*Sālimī*, *Al-Tamhīd fī Bayān al-Tawḥīd*, 189.

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Allauidin Usmandi Samarkandî – Is A Great Scholar Who Contributes to Maturidi Literature

SONUÇ

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